SANGAM OF TWELVE ALVARS IN SRILA PRABHUPADA

POIGAI ALVAR, BHOOTHATHALVAR & PEYALVAR (MUDHAL ALVARS)

Poigai Alvar, Bhoothathalvar and Peyalvar are called Mudhal Alvars (first three Alvars).

One day, in Kanchipuram Poigai Alvar appeared in a lotus. The very next day, in Mahabalipuram Bhoothathalvar appeared in a flower, and the following day Peyalvar appeared in Adi Kesava Perumal temple in Mylapore.

Lord Vishnu appeared to the Mudhal Alvars at Thirukkoilur. It was day time but it darkened and started raining heavily. The wandering Poigai found a small room which had space for one person to lie down. Bhoothath arrived there looking for a hiding place and Poigai accommodated him, with both sitting together. After sometime, Pey also came to the same place seeking shelter from the heavy downpour. All three preferred to stand because of lack of space. It was densly dark inside the small space and they were not able to see each other. They were discussing Bhagavata.

They suddenly felt a fourth person forcing his way amongst them. Lightning struck and briefly lit up the room. The three Alvars noticed that the fourth person had a charming face that was sublime and divine. The trio could immediately realize that it was Lord Vishnu who was huddling amongst them. Poigai wished to see Lord Vishnu's face continuously but could only catch a glipmse when the lightning struck. Desiring continuous light, he instantly composed one hundred songs wishing the earth to be a big pot full of ghee where the sun could be the burning wick.

The song is also interpreted as the Alvar praying to the Lord to remove the darkness and asking for His unlimited knowledge and power. Bhoothathalvar also sang 100 songs desiring to light the lamp constantly through ardent love for Lord Vishnu. Peyalvar sang another 100 songs where he described the enchanting charm of the divine face and the association of Lord Narayana equipped with Chakra and Shankha, and His divine consort Goddess Lakshmi.

The works of these earliest saints contributed to the philosophical and theological ideas of Vaishnavism. Along with the three Saiva Nayanmars, they influenced the ruling Pallava

kings of South India, resulting in changing the religious geography from Buddhism and Jainism to the two sects of Hinduism or Sanatana Dharma.

Srila Prabhupada in the mood of Mudhal Alvars

In October of 1952, Abhay Charan De, as Srila Prabhupada was then known, began preaching Krishna consciousness in Jhansi, India, about 150 miles west of Allahabad. With the support of local doctors and businessmen, he began an organization—the League of Devotees—dedicated to spreading Krishna consciousness in India and abroad.

In the Radha Memorial Building in Jhansi, in a small room, similar to the confined space of the Mudhal Alvars, the Supreme Lord appeared to Srila Prabhupada. Bahushira Dasa narrates this pastime.

> **Bahushira**: After Prabhupada's disappearance I began helping Satsvarupa with the *Lilamrta* by interviewing people in India who had known Srila Prabhupada. One of them was Acharya Prabhakara Misra, Prabhupada's first disciple. Acharya Prabhakara was clean-cut, well behaved and articulate. His demeanor impressed me. He had an M.A. and Ph.D. and was a very cultured Sanskrit scholar and teacher. In Jhansi Prabhupada had told Acharya Prabhakara, "I met you here because I saw you in a dream and I knew I was supposed to come here." Prabhupada and he would do *bhajan* together, they'd hold Ratha-yatra festivals, and they'd have programs in villages in the area.
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> Acharya Prabhakara said that on Krishna Janmastami in 1954, he had to go to Delhi. When he came back to Jhansi, he took a little rest, woke up at 1:00 a.m. and heard Prabhupada ecstatically playing *mridanga* in the temple room. Prabhupada was chanting in total bliss. Acharya Prabhakara went upstairs and saw Prabhupada bouncing around the temple room doing *kirtan*. Prabhupada was wearing a *kadamba* flower garland that went all the way down to his feet. *Kadamba* flowers are very rare in Jhansi and when they are available they are usually the size of a golf ball, but the ones on Prabhupada's garland were big—the size of tennis balls. And he said the atmosphere and aroma was *aprakrt*—nonmaterial. It was surcharged and smelled like the heavenly planets. Acharya Prabhakara wanted to ask Srila Prabhupada, "Where did this garland come from? You can't buy it in a market." But Prabhupada wouldn't answer. He just kept doing *kirtan*, bouncing around the temple room chanting. The

next morning Acharya Prabhakara asked Srila Prabhupada, "Where did you get the garland, why did it smell so much, and why were you feeling so blissful?" Srila Prabhupada told him, "I was chanting to Krishna and feeling some love for Him, and He appeared and gave me this garland. I went to touch His feet, and He disappeared. Because of that, I was dancing around the temple room." Prabhupada was crying.

Acharya Prabhakara was very believable and I felt that what he said was valid. He also said that sometimes Srila Prabhupada's mood was to do *kirtan* intensely. He would chant on and on and on—for three days straight without eating and sleeping. Ordinarily we never hear about Srila Prabhupada chanting for two or three days straight. We hear that sometimes he wouldn't eat for long periods, especially near the end, but remarkably, in Jhansi, he was doing *kirtan* for a long period of time without eating and sleeping. And the result of his *bhajan* was that Krishna appeared.

(Ref: Srila Prabhupada – Remembrances, Ch 44. Siddhanta dasa, ITV)

After this incident Srila Prabhupada took the complete mercy of Supreme Lord and built a worldwide organization for propagation of Krishna consciousness.

Conclusion: It is said that after the Lord appeared to the Mudhal Alvars in a small room in Thiru Kovilur, the *Divya-prabandham* started with *Mudhal Tiruvandadhi* (First 100 Songs), *Irandam Tiruvandadhi* (Second 100 Songs), and *Mundram Tiruvandadhi* (Third 100 Songs) and it was further extended by other Alvars. The religions which were apparently overpowering *sanatana-dharma* at that time were subdued by the philosophical influence of the Mudhal Alvars. This was one of the main reasons for Supreme Lord blessing them with His *darshana*.

Similarly, to establish a proper base for *santana-dharma*, the Supreme Lord appeared to His pure devotee in a small room in Jhansi and empowered him to subdue the other religions. By the mercy of the Supreme Lord, Srila Prabhupada travelled the length and breadth of the world and established the supremacy of Krishna consciousness over all other religions.

THIRUMALISAI ALVAR

Thirumalisai Alvar was an incarnation of Sudarshana *chakra* (the divine discus of Lord Vishnu). He was born to Barghava Muni and Kanakangi at Tirumalisai near Kanchipuram. Even though the fetus was in the mother's womb for an unusual 12 months, when delivered it was without arms, legs, etc. The parents left it at the foot of a bush of cane shrubs in the forest. Lord Vishnu and Lakshmi appeared and blessed the child which then became fully developed into a lovely baby.

A childless tribal couple called Tiruvaalan and Pankaya Chelvi engaged in cutting canes found the child and took it home. The child would not eat or drink anything nor did it show any signs of expelling waste material from its body. When an old agriculturist couple offered milk in a bowl, the child drank it with relish. One day, the couple drank of the milk left over by the child. They regained youth and in due course had a son born to them whom they named as Kanikannan.

Thirumalisai studied all the religions like Buddhism, Jainism, etc. He even lived for some time as a Shaivaite (Follower of Lord Shiva). Later he was transformed by the instructions of Peyalvar and introduced to the devotional service of Lord Hari.

It is very important for us to know the story of Thirumalisai Alvar and Kannikannan.

Thirumalisai Alvar and his disciple Kanikannan were living in Kanchipuram, worshiping Lord Vishnu at the Yatotakari temple. One day the Pallava king summoned Kanikannan to his court. The king asked Kanikannan to tell Thirumalisai Alvar to compose a poem in praise of the king. Kanikannan responded that his *guru* only composed poems in praise of Lord Vishnu, not human beings. The king then asked if Kanikannan would at least compose a poem in praise of him, and he offered him gold and jewels in exchange. But Kanikannan refused, saying that he too only composed poems in praise of Lord Vishnu. The king was furious and exiled Kanikannan from Kanchipuram. When Thirumalisai Alvar heard what had happened, he decided to leave the city as well. He told the Vishnu Deity of the Yatotakari temple to come with him. And the Vishnu Deity got up, and walked out of the city! As soon as the three of them left, Kanchipuram was plunged into darkness. The king realized the errors of his ways and begged Thirumalisai Alvar and Kanikannan to come back. They agreed, and told Lord Vishnu to come back to the Yatotakari temple. Lord Vishnu came back and lied down from right to left, rather than left to right as is usual, as a reminder of how He had left and come back. It is because of this pastime that the Vishnu Deity of the temple is called Sonnavannam Seitha Perumal or "Vishnu who did as He was told."

Srila Prabhupada in the mood of Thirumalisai Alvar

Srila Prabhupada went to New York, the most populated American city, which exerts considerable influence on media, commerce, research, technology, education, entertainment, and many other fields. After starting his movement there, Prabhupada, with a similar motive, returned to Bombay, in 1970–71, to launch it in India. Bombay is India's largest city. Being a port, it has at times experienced unconstrained economic growth, with much foreign influence, and has been most susceptible to change. The population in the early 1970s was six million.

In Srila Prabhupada's twelve years of worldwide traveling and preaching, nowhere else did he spend as much time as Bombay, though he stayed for long durations in Vrindavan, Mayapur, New York, and Los Angeles. Bombay was his Indian headquarters. He was heard to say, "What Bombay does, the rest of India follows." Prabhupada's main motive was preaching Krishna consciousness in India and the rest of the world. In the business of preaching worldwide and across India, Prabhupada excelled as much as an astute businessman, not forgetting for a moment that his business was for Krishna. He carefully planned that Bombay become his office.

When Prabhupada was in Juhu in the early 1960s to see his patron Srimati Sumati Morarji, the director of the Scindia Steam Navigation Company, about two blocks away from her home he noticed a large plot of land and prayed to Krishna, "If you ever give me this land, I will build a wonderful temple for You."

In the beginning, Srila Prabhupada invited the Deities to come to Hare Krishna Land. He said, "My dear Sirs, You come and stand here and I will build a beautiful temple for You." And in spite of all the difficulties along the way, Srila Prabhupada remained faithful to his promise to his Lords. At the end, when Prabhupada was successful at least in getting the land, he commented that "Actually I was not so interested in this land. But because I invited Krishna to come here, then to drive Krishna away would have been a great insult and I could not tolerate that." So for Prabhupada, the Deities are Krishna, Radha and Krishna, and actually They are. When we come before the Deities, we should not just see marble statues but we should see, "Yes, we are standing in front of Radha and Krishna," and we should act in such a way that They will be pleased with us. So everything about Krishna consciousness is meant to bring us in touch with Krishna. The Holy Name of Krishna is Krishna, the words

of Krishna in *Bhagavad-gita* are Krishna, and the words about Krishna in *Srimad-Bhagavatam* are Krishna. Prabhupada's whole mission was just to bring us in touch with Krishna, to revive our eternal relationship with Krishna; and he knew that if people became Krishna conscious, then all their problems would be solved individually and collectively all of the problems of the world would be solved. Srila Prabhupada had personal realization and he had a very deep conviction, and thus he inspired all of us.

Srila Prabhupada devoted time and made determined efforts to secure this land in Juhu and build a temple for Sri Sri Radha-Rasabihari. On Prabhupada's behalf, Krishna tolerated staying in a crude shack just to fulfill His pure devotee's promise. It was as though Krishna had signed a contract with Prabhupada to let his dream become a reality. The Juhu temple will always remain the symbol of struggle and triumph—in many respects, a Prabhupada institution in and of itself.

The land acquisition in Juhu was for the purpose of allowing Bombayites to engage in a Krishna conscious way of life. In his epic struggle for the land, Prabhupada demonstrated his leadership as a businessman. He was undaunted, uncompromising, and perseverant to the end. As a businessman fighting for Krishna and not himself, he stood firm always. To get the Juhu property for Krishna, Prabhupada displayed a warlike, defiant mood after atrocities perpetrated by Mr. Nair, the property owner, and his wife. Yet when Mrs. Nair came to surrender the land to him after her husband's fatal heart attack, Prabhupada accepted her as a daughter. Politeness, humility, tolerance, and determination were Srila Prabhupada's leadership trademarks. He was a perfect gentleman, a true friend, and everyone's well-wisher.

Conclusion: If we carefully analyze the incidents of both Thirumalisai Alvar and Srila Prabhupada, we can see how the Lord is bound to the words of his pure devotee.

Thirumalisai Alvar told the Lord to come with him and He immediately followed the request and changed His residence. Srila Prabhupada requested the Lord to stay in Hare Krishna Land and not move under any circumstances. The Lord tolerated all the offenses and attacks of the property owner, and the short-comings of the followers. Even though the Lord is supremely independent, He agreed to the request of His pure devotee Srila Prabhupada. In saving Maharaja Ambarisa, the Lord told Durvasa Muni, "I am not independent, I will

faithfully follow the orders of my pure devotees". This happened in the case of Thirumalisai Alvar and Srila Prabhupada.

THIRUMANGAI ALVAR

Thirumangai Alvar is the last of the 12 Alvars. He was a Chola king and he married Kumudavali Deviyar who was the daughter of a Vaishnavite doctor. Thirumangai Alvar was a very brave person. In fact he was not a thief at first. Once he turned into a Vaishnavite, Kumudavali Deviyar asked him to promise her that he would feed 1,008 Vaishnavas daily and restorate of Srirangam temple. Unable to bear the expenses he resorted to robbery. Since he was a muscular and strong person, many feared him.

Once he stopped a newly married couple and tried to remove the toe ring of the bride-groom but he could not. The newly married couple were none other than Sriman Narayana and Lakshmi Devi. Lord Narayana himself initiated him by revealing the meaning of the *ashtakshara*. From then on he gave up robbing. He composed many poems glorifying the Lord.

Thirumangai Alvar also made a significant contribution, visiting and singing the praise of Lord Vishnu in over 85 *divya-desam* temples.

Srila Prabhupada in the mood of Thirumangai Alvar

In 1975, at the peak of Hare Krishna Movement, devotees were criticized in many parts of the world for selling books and incense using 'tricks'. The proceeds from these sales was being used for the temple construction in Mayapur and Vrindavana. Especially severe was the criticism about the team in Tokyo where everyone was very vigorously distributing books under the leadership of Gurukripa Prabhu. Many saw their techniques as cheating. When Srila Prabhupada heard about the criticism, he exhibited the mood of Thirumangai Alvar. Below is the extract of his words in Tokyo.

> **Srila Prabhupada**: They are accusing us of frauding, cheating, but they do not understand. Even if we take some money from others by so-called fraud or cheat, but it goes to Krsna... Just like Gurukrpa Maharaja. If you say if he's taking by this way or

that way, but what he is doing? He is not smoking with that money. He is not drinking. He is sending to Krsna. Therefore he is giving the best service. So people may say, "Nonsense people. They're doing this, doing that." But he is giving the best service to Krsna because he is not accepting a farthing out of this. And these so-called worldly, honest men, they may be very honest, moral, but they are taking everything for their sense gratification. They are dishonest. They are the greatest fraud. Krsna's money they are taking for their own satisfaction. The greatest fraud.

(Ref: Bhagavad-gita 16.8 – January 28, 1975, Tokyo)

And also in the mood of Thirumangai Alvar, Srila Prabhupada travelled and established 108 temples around the world. He travelled worldwide to spread the glories of the Lord amongst a wide variety of peoples and races.

Conclusion: Both Thirumangai Alvar and Srila Prabhupada are ready to take extreme steps for the service of the Lord, especially for temple construction. These two *acaryas* also traveled extensively to preach the glories of the Supreme Lord.

THONDARADIPPODI ALVAR

Thondaradippodi Alvar was a Tamil Vaishnava saint. His childhood name was Vipranarayana. He led a life of devotion to Lord Narayana and served the Lord by offering garlands. He maintained a beautiful garden full of scented flowers from numerous trees, plants and creepers. His name means one who is "the dust at the feet of devotees of Lord Narayana."

The Lord once desired to perform some pastime with His devotee. In Sri Rangam, lived two beautiful sisters Devi and Devadevi. Once, while returning after giving a dance performance in the palace of the Chola king, they became attracted by the beauty of Vipranarayana's *nandavana* (garden). As they glanced over the garden, their eyes fell on Vipranarayana. His eyes half-closed, he sat in deep meditation, absorbed in thoughts of the Lord. His body gave off a charming effulgence, the result of severe austerities and devotion. The sisters were captivated! Vipra Narayana however was unmoved and ignored their beauty.

Devadevi, the more beautiful younger sister, was offended. She vowed to make Vipranarayana her slave with her beauty. In spite of her sister's warning not to commit such an offence and endanger herself, Devadevi remained adamant. Dressing herself as a *sannyasini*, she approached Vipranarayana and requested him to accept her service. Unaware of the plot, he agreed. However he did not let her stay in his hermitage. He continued his services unaffected by her presence. As time passed Devadevi's desperation grew—she was getting nowhere in fulfilling her vow.

One day it rained heavily and Devadevi got drenched. She stood shivering in the garden. Vipranarayana could not say no for her coming into his hermitage (which he avoided till then) and Devadevi slowly aroused his sensual desires. Vipranarayana became captivated. He became neglectful of his service and *bhajana*. He only thought about Devadevi and desired her so much that he could not bear even a moments separation from her.

When Devadevi achieved what she had wished for, she went back to her place in Uttamarkoil, near Sri Rangam. Her mother didn't allow Vipranarayana to see her unless he brought some money (which he did not have naturally). Vipranarayana felt isolated and lamented pitiably in separation from Devadevi. He did not know what to do.

Lord Ranganatha felt He had sufficiently tried His devotee. Out of His causeless mercy, He appeared as a servant of Vipranarayana calling Himself "Azhagiya Manavala Dasan" and went to Devadevi's house. He handed over the big golden vessel (*Thanga vattil*) saying that Vipranarayana had asked Him to give this to her. Devadevi's mother went in search of Vipranarayana and allowed him meet her daughter. She did not tell him why she allowed him now; Vipranarayana also did not ask. The next morning, the *pujaris* found one of the *vattils* missing in the temple and immediately informed the king.

Devadevi's servant-maid, meanwhile, had informed others about the golden *vattil*. The news reached the king and he immediately arrested Vipranarayana. Vipranarayana pleaded that he was not aware of any golden *vattil*; nor did he have any servant working for him, being himself so poor. No amount of pleading helped and he landed up in a dark cell! There he realized everything—his mistakes, his follies, and his offense of not performing service to the Lord.

The Lord appeared in the king's dream and revealed that Vipranarayana, his dear devotee, was innocent and not at fault. The king immediately released Vipranarayana and prostrated at his feet begging his pardon. Vipranarayana felt greatly moved by the Lord's mercy and

surcharged with *bhakti* sang the glories of Lord. Having gone through a traumatic experience with Devadevi, he never looked back and became a staunch devotee. Out of great humility, he called himself Thondaradippodi Alvar, one who is "the dust at the feet of devotees of Lord Narayana."

Thondaradippodi Alvar's mood can be seen in one of his compositions:

oorilen kaniyillai, uravu matru oruvar illai,

paril nin patha moolam patrilen parama moorthee,

karoli vannane (en) kannane! kadharuginren,

arular kalaikan amma! arngama nagarulane!

"I have no place, no properties, no relatives, none other than you. I know only your Lotus feet, O Lord of bluish complexion! You are my only refuge. Can you not hear my cries? Who else but you can save me?"

Srila Prabhupada in the mood of Thondaradippodi Alvar

Although Srila Prabhupada and Thondaradippodi Alvar's life stories are completely different, a careful analysis will reveal how Srila Prabhupada carried the mood of Thondaradippodi Alvar in his heart.

After renouncing family, friends, and business, Srila Prabhupada resided in Vrindavana dedicating all his time in the service of Lord Krishna. Utterly dependent on the Lord, he cried for the Lord's mercy to serve his *guru*. During this time he wrote a series of poems called *Vrindavane Bhajana*.

Vrindavane Bhajane, Verse 1:

I am sitting alone in Vrndavana-dhama

In this mood I am getting many realizations.

I have my wife, sons, daughters, grandsons, everything,

But I have no money so they are a fruitless glory.

Krsna has shown me the naked form of material nature,

By his strength it has all become tasteless to me today.

yasyaham anugrhnami harisye tad-dhanam sanaih

"I gradually take away all the wealth of those upon whom I am merciful."

How was I able to understand this mercy of the All-merciful?

Conclusion: Although Thondaradippodi Alvar and Srila Prabhupada's pastimes are in different dimensions, when the Lord put them in the circumstance of leaving their assets of material life, both expressed their utter dependence and crying alone in wilderness for Lord's mercy.

THIRUPPAAN ALVAR

Sri Rangam, known as Bhuloka Vaikuntha, is the land of divine breezes and many wonderful gifts. Near Sri Rangam is a small village named Alagapuri, which is home to many musicians. In there is the Paanar Cheri area, where Paanar or musicians capable of captivating the minds of all people—even *devas* and *rishis*—reside.

As time went on, the Paanars are segregated and treated as untouchables. But in that community appeared the *amsha* of Srivatsa, the small mark on the chest of Lord Narayana. The child was born on Wednesday in Rohini *nakshatra*, Kartigai month, Purthurmadhi year and later on became celebrated as Thiruppaan Alvar. His character and activities were that of a pure Vaishnava. Playing a *vina*, he always sang the glories of Sri Vishnu and the love he offers to his *bhaktas*. Because of this, he was also known as Paan Perumal.

Due to the rigid caste system, people from the untouchable community were not allowed near some stretched of the river Kaveri. Obeying this order, Paan Alvar did not touch the

river Kaveri, but stood along its banks facing Sri Rangam temple and sang various songs praising the Lord.

Lord Ranganatha was pleased with the devotion of Thiruppaan Alvar and wanting to glorify him, he enacted a wonderful pastime.

Water from river Kaveri is used for the *thirumanjanam* (*abhiseka*) of Sri Ranganatha. Loka Saranga Mahamuni, a strict follower and devout *bhakta* of Sri Ranganatha, would daily bring the Kaveri water for *thriumanjanam*. One day Lord Ranganatha appeared in his dream and asked him to bring Paan Perumal on his shoulders, without considering that he is an untouchable. Loka Saranga Mahamuni, rose early the next morning and went to the other side of the Kaveri to meet Thiruppaan Alvar. On seeing him he explained about the dream and requested him to climb on his shoulders so that he could be taken to the other side of the Kaveri, where Sri Ranganatha was receiving his *seva*.

On hearing this Thiruppaan Alvar started crying. How could he climb on the shoulders of Loka Saranga Mahamuni, who was a well known Vaishnava? Being non envious, Loka Saranga Mahamuni said, "Thiruppaan Alvar, it is only due to you that Lord Narayana appeared in my dream. I would be greatly honoured if you climb on my shoulders."

Thirupaan Alvar relented. With the Alvar on his shoulders, Loka Saranga Mahamuni started walking towards Sri Ranganatha through the river Kaveri. All the villagers were surprised to see this scene and stood in silence not knowing what to do.

On reaching the temple, Loka Saranga Mahamuni requested Thirupaan Alvar to get down. Raising his hands, he went to the corner of the temple room and stood in silence, having *darshana* of Lord Ranganatha.

Thiruppan Alvar could not believe his eyes—he was able to have *darshana* of Lord Ranganatha. He had thought this would not be possible in this life. As tears started flowing from his eyes, he raised both his hands, and started chanting various *slokas* glorifying Lord Ranganatha. After seeing the beauty of the *thiruvadi* (lotus feet) of the Lord, he gradually had *darshana* of the whole body. He sang ten *pasurams* (hymns) describing the beauty of Lord Ranganatha from His *thiruvadi* (lotus feet) to *thirumudi* (head). Absorbed by the love of the Lord, he went towards Lord Ranganatha and immediately attained liberation.

Inspite of being born in an untouchable family, due to his devotion towards Lord Narayana, Thiruppan Alvar is listed among the twelve great *alvars*. Even though people are born in

various castes due to one's past *karma* or desires, everyone can attain the lotus feet of the Lord irrespective of caste, creed, color, or race. The lotus feet of the Lord is the shelter of all the Alvars.

Srila Prabhupada in the mood of Thiruppan Alvar

Even though Srila Prabhupada was born in an orthodox Vaishanava family, the mission he received from his Guru was to propagate Krishna consciousness to everyone. Taking this instruction to heart, he undertook many struggles all through his life, to share the message of Godhead with everyone in the world.

> **Satsvarupa:** I cannot think of a single instance of Prabhupada making me or anyone else feel inferior on the basis of our birth in *mleccha* nations. He never said or even implied, "Don't forget, you're an untouchable." He wasn't like that.
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> But many caste *brahmanas*, and even some who follow the Vaisnava religion in India, thought that Prabhupada's Western disciples could not really be accepted into Krsna consciousness. Prabhupada would defend us, "They were *mlecchas*, but they've given it up." And he said this on the basis of the sastra. Srila Prabhupada received this viewpoint from his own Guru Maharaja and it is also the compassionate message of the Vedic scriptures. Lord Caitanya also said that people all over the world should be given the holy name of Krsna. Lord Krsna says everyone is eligible: *kirata-hunandhra-pulinda pulkasa*, all tribal people, even those who may be considered inferior races by material standards, are all eligible to take to Krsna consciousness. One who is a pandita sees everyone equally, whether he is a *brahmana* or a dog-eater—because the real person is not the body; he's the soul. Everyone can become Krsna conscious.
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> Prabhupada took this sastric conclusion as an essential part of his preaching. Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura advised Prabhupada to preach in the West, so how could he do it unless the mlecchas were eligible to become Vaisnavas? Prabhupada never hesitated or seemed uncomfortable in carrying out this message, because he was a mahatma. His thinking was broad-minded, whereas the other thinking—that because people were raised as meat-eaters, they have a permanent disability in this lifetime—is crippled thinking. Prabhupada's attitude was, "As soon as you give it up, you can be forgiven." In confidential exchanges with his disciples he might remind us that we were ex-*mlecchas* and had some bad habits, but he always assured us that our

saving grace was to practice the rules and regulations and to chant Hare Krsna. Then there would be no taint based on material designation.

An example of Prabhupada defending his disciples is in his stance against prejudice in Jagannatha Puri, Orissa. Because the caretakers of the temple do not allow Westerners to enter, even if they have been practicing Krsna consciousness for their whole lives, Srila Prabhupada preferred not to personally go into the temple. I was present with him when he stayed for a few days in a beach hotel at Jagannatha Puri. A friendly *pandita* from the Jagannatha temple came and sang the Jagannatha slokas, "*Jagannatha svami nayana-patha-gami bhavatu me*." When he finished singing, Prabhupada said, "Yes, you are praying Jagannatha Svami, please reveal Yourself to me. So why do you not let these Western boys see Jagannatha Svami? They're practicing Vaisnavism exactly in all details." As Prabhupada said these words, there we were at his feet, me, Gargamuni, Gurukrpa, all ex-mlecchas from America. And here was our patron saint, Srila Prabhupada, going out on a limb and saying, "What's the problem? Why can't they see Lord Jagannatha?" We were all very touched by seeing Prabhupada speak up for us. He went on to tell the pandita that these boys have a yearning to see the Lord. "They want to see Jagannatha," said Prabhupada, "and your prayer says, 'Jagannatha, I want to see You,' so why don't you let them see Him? Of course, if you don't we don't mind. We have our own temples where Jagannatha is installed."

Sometimes *brahmanas* or svamis in India officially accept the Western devotees, but with some restraints and conditions. In Srila Prabhupada, there was no tinge like that. He never drew back from contact with us in the mood of, "Yes, you're devotees, but I don't want to eat with you," or, "I admit that you're a devotee but I don't want to get too close to you." Srila Prabhupada allowed the ex-*mlecchas* to massage and to cook for him.

He even called Australia "The land of the *mlecchas*." But once the residents of *mleccha-desa* took to Krsna consciousness, Prabhupada was pleased to call upon Lord Krsna to appear in the Deities of Radha-Krsna to be worshiped by the Australian devotees of ISKCON.

Sometimes when we made blunders, especially those involving uncleanliness, Prabhupada reminded us that we were ex-*mlecchas*. But when he did that it was like a father getting heavy with his son, reminding him of his place. When it came down to it, Prabhupada never had disdain for us, but saw us as sanctified by the practice of

Krsna consciousness. One time when I was Prabhupada's secretary he called for his Sanskrit secretary, Panditji (born Paul Sherbow of Massachusetts, U.S.A.) to come and give him a massage. Panditji was busy writing and so called back, "Just a minute, Prabhupada! I've got to go wash my hands."

Prabhupada called back, "There's no question of washing your hands. You're sanctified. You're a Vaisnava."

This tolerance by Prabhupada was not a liberal side issue, but it was a main conviction—that his followers were sanctified because of the power of the holy name. We are spirit souls, not this body.

(Ref: Prabhupada Meditations, Volume I - Satsvarupa dasa Goswami)

Conclusion: Taking the mood of the Thiruppan Alvar, Srila Prabhupada went around the world for only one purpose—to propagate the message that the Lord is for everyone. Born of any caste, even a non-*brahmana* caste, everyone can become a devotee of Lord Krishna. Lord is for everyone. Please take shelter of Lord.

PERIYALVAR

During the 9th century CE, a king named Vallabhadeva ruled Madurai. He was an excellent king and a great devotee of Lord Vishnu. He wished to know the meaning of the *Vedas* and the glory of the Supreme Truth. He enquired from his ministers how to best fulfill this desire. The ministers said, "Let us bring Vedic scholars. Place your questions and seek clarifications from them, O mighty king. Whoever answers you satisfactorily can be greatly rewarded."

The king agreed and announcements were made throughout the kingdom. A bag full of gold coins would be hung from the top and only when the true Vedic underlying principle is stated would it fall automatically.

Numerous scholars and *panditas* presented their statements and arguments, but the bag remained hanging. The true Vedic underlying principle/statement was not known to anybody. The king was terribly disappointed.

There was a priest named Vishnucitta in Srivilliputhur. Lord Narayana, Sri Vatapatrasayi, appeared in Vishnucitta's dream and said, "O devotee, I am impressed with your *poomalai kainkaryam* (garland service). Go to the palace tomorrow and speak the Vedic principles and receive the reward." Vishnucitta said, "I am not well versed in *Vedas*, I did not even study them. I wasted my time without learning the *Vedas*. I have only made garlands for you Lord. I cannot speak any Vedic truths since I do not know them."

The Lord smiled, "O Vishnucitta, do you think that you are doing this garland service with your own ability? You are only an instrument. I will speak through you. Do not worry. Just proceed."

The Lord appeared in the minister's dream too and asked him to arrange to bring Vishnucitta the next day in a palanquin with full honors. The next day Vishnucitta prayed to the Lord and sat in the palanquin which took him to the palace. The scholars laughed at his greed for they knew of his limited (or no) knowledge of the *Vedas*. They loudly passed sarcastic statements. But once Vishnucitta started his explanation (after a small prayer) the murmurs stopped, the sarcasm disappeared, and people listened keenly.

The king, the ministers, the scholars and the common men, everybody could follow the simple statements which were full of deep meanings. Wondeful Vedic truths were flowing out of Vishnucitta's mouth like waves coming out of the great ocean. The entire meaning of his statement was clearly understood by one and all and when Vishnucitta made the concluding statement that Lord Mahavishnu, the *Sriya-pati*, is the only *paramporul* (Supreme Personality of Godhead) who is protecting and blessing the whole Universe and all beings and is the only underlying principle of all four *Vedas*, the bag with gold coins fell by itself! And it fell into the hands of Vishnucitta. The king got up immediately, and as joyful tears fell from his eyes he prostrated at the feet of Vishnucitta. He appreciated "I am now clear. You have clarified all my doubts. Sriman Narayana is the *paramporul* (Lord Narayana is Supreme Personality of Godhead). I have never heard such deep meanings in such simple explanation."

All the scholars lowered their heads in utter shame, their pride was removed and they celebrated Vishnucitta's victory. Highly pleased, the king gave away more gifts and

addressed him as Bhattarpiran, the "leader of the saints." Vishnucitta said "O king, I am dumb, I never spoke. It is He who spoke here through me. He is the flutist, I am only a bamboo stick. I am only a plant, He is the one who bloomed the flower. I am only a puppet, He is the *karta* and puppeteer. Please do not praise me. Please do not prostrate at my feet. Let us all prostrate at Lord Narayana's lotus feet. Come." Vishnucitta was deeply moved, his hands shook and his body shivered, as he thought of the Lord's mercy on his lowly self.

The king made Vishnucitta sit on the royal elephant and arranged for a grand procession in the streets of his kingdom. Everywhere people thronged to see the blessed soul and everywhere people were shouting "*Bhattarpiran vazhga*! *Bhattarpiran vazhga*!" Vishnucitta was crying all the while, his palms were folded together, and his mind fully absorbed in thinking of Lord Narayana and His mercy. When all these festivities were going on, Lord Narayana also wished to see this great scene and enjoy His devotee being admired and appreciated. Accompanied by Lakshmi-devi, He appeared in the sky riding on His eagle carrier Garuda. Everybody present—the king, the ministers, the jealous scholars, everybody saw Him and His consort on Garuda! (What a blessed place and blessed people. Were we not even insects in that place during that time?). Seeing the Lord, Vishnucitta was ecstatic and using the bells adorning the elephant, he started to play and sang:

"*pallaandu, pallaandu pallayiratthandu palakoti noorayiram*"

(Long live! Long live! Long live for hundreds of thousands of years!)

Vishnucitta blessed the Lord to live eternally and forever! That is why he is called Periya Alvar—the eldest Alvar, because he blessed the Lord Himself!

Srila Prabhupada in the mood of Periya Alvar

> **Brahmananda das**: Part of Prabhupada's leaving America, going back to India, is that there were the circumstances of myself and some others that were so offensive that Prabhupada wanted to leave, but another aspect is that he did not want to leave. There is a conversation, it's in the Conversations, Prabhupada talks about how Lord Dwarakadisa wanted Prabhupada to go back to India, and Prabhupada didn't want to go. Prabhupada didn't want to go because his spiritual master had given him the Western world to preach in, and Prabhupada considered that his godbrothers, they were given India to preach in. So there was no need for him to be in India. And

furthermore, that he had just gotten the Watseka Avenue facility and he wanted to develop that as the World Headquarters for the Hare Krishna Movement. But in this conversation, Prabhupada says that "Lord Dwarakadisa ordered me to go." He said, "I was talking with the Deity and I was arguing with Lord Dwarakadisa that 'I don't want to go,' and Lord Dwarakadisa was commanding me to go, that 'I want you to go.'" And Prabhupada was saying, "But I have this very nice temple and I want to develop it." And Lord Dwarakadisa said, "All right. I want you to go to India, that if you go to India I will give you a temple that is better than this Watseka." Prabhupada couldn't refuse that and Prabhupada said, "All right." Then, of course, Prabhupada came to India, and Prabhupada got the Krishna-Balarama Mandir.

(Ref: Following Srila Prabhupada – Remembrances)

Conclusion: In this case Periya Alvar and Srila Prabhupada both initial disagreed with the Lord with respect to their assigned services and finally they obeyed the order of the Lord and succeeded in the endeavor.

SRI ANDAL

Andal is one of the most extraordinary personalities in religious history. She is known in her native tongue of Tamil as an Alvar, one who is immersed in the depths of enjoyment of God, the omnipresent Supreme Personality of Godhead.

While Lord Vishnu rests on the Ocean of Milk, Bhu Devi (the Earth goddess) visits Him with a flower garland. Lord Vishnu tells her that He would like Her to offer Him garlands of songs. The goddess asks Him for such a boon and accordingly, she is born on Earth.

The life of Andal is remarkable in its romantic simplicity. Vishnuchitta or Periyalvar, a devout *brahmana* and one among the twelve Alvars, lived in Srivilliputhur, a town near Madurai. He was an ardent devotee of Lord Vishnu and he dedicated his life to the service of Lord Vatapatrasayi (the Lord of Srivilliputhur *divya-desam*). His daily duties included procuring flowers for the worship of the Lord at the local temple. One morning, as he went about his business, he discovered a baby girl lying under a *tulasi* plant in his flower garden. Having no family of his own, Vishnuchitta felt it was God's grace that gave him this child

and he named her Goda or one who has beautiful hair. Filled with joy, he took her home and raised her as his own.

Andal learnt from an elderly person that in Krishna *lila* all the *gopis* performed a fast in the (Tamil) month of Margazhi in order to marry Krishna. Since Andal wanted to marry Krishna, she followed the footsteps of those gopis and started the fast in the month of Margazhi (Dec-Jan). She would wake up early in the morning. Singing a new hymn everyday, she would go door to door and wake her friends up to join the fast. Thus she sang 30 hymns for 30 days of the Margazhi month. The 30 hymns are collectively called as *Thiruppavai* (Thiru-p-paavai). On the 30th day, she slept peacefully having completed the fast. She was sure that Lord Krishna would come to marry her.

Andal's exemplary behaviour during these thirty fast-days carries many important lessons for the Vaishnavas. Firstly, she did not go alone to worship the Lord. She woke everyone up and together they went to workship the Lord. The verses of *Thiruppavai* describe Andal, accompanied by her friends, going towards Sri Vrindavana *dhama*, the land of Lord Krishna, and requesting all the Vrajavasis—the door-keepers, Nanda Maharaja, Mother Yasodha, etc.—to allow her to serve the Lord. The overall mood of *Thiruppavai* is to bring everyone to Vrindavana or at the shelter of Lord Krishna.

Srila Prabhupada in the mood of Andal

> **Satsvarupa**: Prabhupada described how he had left his peaceful life in Vrndavana to take on so much burden and anxiety for Krsna. Just as he had taken a risk by going to America in old age, so his disciples should accept whatever difficulties were required in preaching Krsna consciousness. "The work is not pleasurable," Prabhupada said, "but making so many devotees is pleasurable." (Ref: Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta) And bring them to Vrindavan.

> **Yamuna dasi**: Before we went to India for the first time, in San Francisco in 1967, Achyutananda sent us pictures of Srila Prabhupada on *nagar sankirtan* in Calcutta. And when we saw Prabhupada chanting in the streets of India in this one still picture, all of us were just praying for the day that we would join Srila Prabhupada. He said he would take us to India and show us India on foot; and when we were in San Francisco, we had no idea what that meant. But this is what it meant. Going on

pilgrimage to a place is one thing; but until you're on foot in the streets, walking as those before us have walked, chanting the Holy Name, you can't taste India.

While traveling by train with Srila Prabhupada there was a stop at Mathura Junction. We did sankirtan at Mathura Junction station, this being such a holy place and the first time that any of us had touched the holy dham. We were in a trance of ecstasy feeling Lord Krishna's presence by Srila Prabhupada's mercy. When we jumped from these trains to do kirtan, it was the life-giving aspect of our existence. The trains were just vehicles to take us from one kirtan to another. That Srila Prabhupada allowed us to become so attached to kirtan is a miracle, but it was from the beginning in India our main activity. Very oftentimes people didn't join in in the kirtan because they were so quick, just a short 4 or 5 minutes in a station, sometimes 10 minutes. And it was so nice, our party, various people would lead kirtans. It was not one person all the time, people shared the leading of the kirtans. Such a nice experience and, again, the camaraderie was so strong.

When we passed Kurukshetra, Srila Prabhupada called us all to the train car. We were standing looking out the train car door and Srila Prabhupada took his left hand and unfolded his arm and said, "This is where the Battle of Kurukshetra took place," and all of the devotees paid obeisances while we were speeding along in the train. Then we had a small stop in Kurukshetra station, and we jumped out and performed kirtan. We all felt so fortunate to be with Srila Prabhupada.

(Ref: Following Srila Prabhupada – Remembrances)

Madhavananda das: When we arrived in Vrindavan, I remember walking into Srila Prabhupada's room and paying my obeisances and saying, "Srila Prabhupada, what should we do now?" And he looked down at me and he said, "Just wander." So that's exactly what I did. I just went out into the Vrindavan village and everything I'd read about in Nectar of Devotion and Krsna Book, I was thinking of those things. I wanted to take rest under a kalpa-vrksa tree, it's something I'd wanted to do for a long time. So I actually found one tree in the forest, and I actually fell asleep and slept very soundly and very deeply for a couple of hours. When I woke up it was evening time, and I didn't really know where everybody was but I heard in the background the kirtan going on...Hare Krishna. So I followed the sound and I arrived at this big program where Srila Prabhupada and all the devotees were, and the lecture had just

stopped and they were serving out prasadam. That was a great day in my life, just the way it worked out.

(Ref: Following Srila Prabhupada – Remembrances)

Yadubara das: Srila Prabhupada took us to many holy spots in Vrindavan. We would go by bus, and he would ride in this Ambassador car. Here we are at Brahmanda Ghat in Gokula where Mother Yasoda saw the universe in Krishna's mouth. Srila Prabhupada is telling the story, much to our delight. His eyes get big when Mother Yasoda sees the creation. For most of us, this is the first time we'd seen the Yamuna, and we were very eager to bathe in her transcendental waters.

(Ref: Following Srila Prabhupada – Remembrances)

Radhanath Swami: The bus went to Gokula, and we came out. Dinanath prabhu was leading the kirtan and Prabhupada came out of his Ambassador car, which was in front of the bus. Then we walked for some time behind Prabhupada doing harinam sankirtan. Then Prabhupada stopped us and turned around and said, "This is the wrong Gokula. This is Vallabhacarya's Gokula. We want to go to Mahavan Gokula." So then we all got back in the buses. And from there, from what I remember, we went to Brahmanda Ghat where we saw the beauty of the holy river Jamuna. Prabhupada came down with us and he sprinkled water on his head. Then he told all the devotees that they should have full bath. I believe Prabhupada was feeling somewhat ill that day so he said that he was not going to take full bath. So he was sitting on the steps and the devotees were bathing, and Prabhupada was watching us and he was so happy. His disciples, who he loved so very very dearly, who he gave his life and soul to give them Krishna's love, here they were in Gokula at the holy banks of Brahmanda Ghat happily taking their baths in the sacred river Jamuna. What that must have meant for Prabhupada.

(Ref: Following Srila Prabhupada – Remembrances)

Shyamasundara das: He's sitting there watching us take bath, and pretty soon he wants to go in with us. "What can I do? My devotees want me." "Come on,

Prabhupada, come on in!" Here we are saying our Gayatris on sacred threads standing in the Jamuna River. There he comes. Ah, Prabhupada.

(Ref: Following Srila Prabhupada – Remembrances)

Conclusion: Sri Andal and Srila Prabhupada are immersed in Vrindavana consciousness. Andal went house to house awakening everyone from sleep (ignorance) and brought them to Vrindavana, the land of Lord Krishna, by Her *Thiruppavai* song. In a similar mood, Srila Prabhupada went from country to country awakening every soul (*jiva jago, jiva jago*) from ignorance and brought them physically to Sri Vrinadavana *dhama*. Srila Prabhupada continues to bring the whole world to Vrindavana with his Bhaktivedanta purports.

NAMMALVAR

Nammalvar was born in the Vellala clan on the 43rd day of Kali-yuga in Thiru Kurugoor (near Thirunelveli) in the Pandaya dynasty of Tamil Nadu. The child was extraordinary. For several days, it lived with eyes closed in perfect health, without food (not even breast-milk). For days together, it never spoke. Distressed at this, the parents placed the child at the temple of Lord Adinatha, the Deity of Kurugoor, surrendering unto Him the entire burden of bringing up the child.

As the child was completely different from the general human nature, he was named Maran. He was also called Sadagopan, because, unlike other children, he did not allow earthly ignorance to envelope him.

For sixteen long years, Maran sat motionless under the tamarind tree in Adinatha temple without food or drink, eyes closed, in *padmasana*, in utter silence. He was verily a sun in human form with an aura encompassing the universe. He is the *avatara* of Vishvaksena, chief of the hosts of Lord Narayana in Vaikuntha.

Nammalvar remained in a meditative state for as long as 16 years. A Tamil poet and scholar, Madhurakavi, managed to draw out Nammalvar from his *samadhi* by asking him a question. Thereafter, he took Madhurakavi as his first disciple. He taught him about the confidential doctrines of Vaishnavism. Unable to resist the urge of praising the Lord, he spontaneously composed a thousand hymns glorifying Lord Vishnu.

Even though Nammalvar never visited any holy place to see the resident Deity and sing His glories, all the forms of the Lord personally visited Nammalvar to receive glorification. And sitting in one place, Nammalvar, with his compositions, practically spread the glories of Vaishnavism far and wide.

It is also said that to bring the fallen souls back to Vaikuntha, the Lord forcibly sent Nammalvar to this material world. Nammalvar himself mentions this in his works and requests the Lord to take him back as soon as possible.

Srila Prabhupada in the mood of Nammalvar

Following in the footsteps of Nammalvar and in his mood, Srila Prabhupada lived his life in Vrindavana *dhama* completely meditating on the Lord and his mission.

Even though Srila Prabhupada travelled all over the world carrying the message of Lord Chaitanya, he was fixed in his schedule of writing commentary on *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. Like Nammalvar, Srila Prabhupada also sat in one room and composed transcendental literature, through which Vaishnavism is spreading far and wide around the world. This is fondly recollected by Srila Prabhupada himself.

> "That is a *brhat-mrdanga*," said Prabhupada. "I am beating from this room, and the sound goes ten thousand miles away. Our enemies are surprised: "How this man is still going on?' "
>
> (Ref: Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta 52: "I Have Done My Part")

As in the case of Nammalvar, Srila Prabhupada was also forcibly sent by the Lord to this material world for the benefit of the conditional souls. Srila Prabhupada himself shared this indirectly with a disciple in an intimate conversation.

> **Bhavananda**: Prabhupada said, "I have so many palaces all over the world that I can stay in. Practically speaking, there's no difference between the Goswamis and me in terms of our lifestyle. They stayed under a different tree every night; I stay in a different palace every night. They wrote, I write. Originally, I did not want to come here." He was not talking about coming to America, but to this world. He said, "Krishna asked, 'I want you to write those books. Come down and write those books.'" Prabhupada said to Krishna, "But I don't want to go to the material world." Krishna said, "Don't worry. I'll take care of everything. You write those books." That was the

first and only time that I've ever heard or read where Prabhupada actually spoke about Krishna speaking to him and how he didn't want to go. When he spoke in that way the atmosphere was like nothing I've ever experienced.

(Ref: Srila Prabhupada – Remembrances)

Conclusion: Nammalvar is commander-in-chief (Vishvaksena) of Lord Vishnu in Vaikuntha and Srila Prabhupada is commander-in-chief of Lord Chaitanya's *sankirtan* army in Goloka Vrindavana. The Lord forced both the commanders to go and bring the fallen souls back to the spiritual world. Both these *acaryas* performed this service excellently and continue to do so. Nammalvar predicts the spreading of Vaishnavism all over the world in his "*Polige Polige*" verse, which can be applied to both Sri Ramanujacarya and Srila Prabhupada.

MADHURAKAVI ALVAR

Madhurakavi Alvar's apearance is compared to the rays of the sun, which come out before the sun completely comes out. Madhurakavi Alvar was born before Nammalvar. Madhurakavi Alvar is known for his *guru-bhakti* for his *guru* Nammalvar. There are two very significant incidents in his life.

First is his search for liberation and meeting his *guru*.

To facilitate attaining *moksha*, Madhurakavi Alvar decided to go on a spritual tour of the North Indian *kshetras* like Ayodhya, Mathura, Kasi, Dvaraka, etc. Reaching North India, he worshipped all the Vishnu *sthalas*. Finally, he went to the Ayodhya temple and admired the beauty of Sri Rama along with Mother Sita, Lakshmana and Hanuman. He stayed in Ayodhya for a while.

At that time, he heard about a 16 year old child named Nammalvar who was in a meditative state, living without eating anything under a tamarind tree in Alvar Thirunagari.

One day, after finishing the daily *puja*, he saw a bright star in the sky which made him wonder whether any village or house had caught fire, or some big fire is burning the forest. He could not get a definite answer and he left it at that thinking it was some mystery.

Later he found that the bright object was a star that was travelling towards the South. He decided to follow the star. He followed it till he reached Alvar Thirunagari where the star disappeared.

He heard about the child Nammalvar who hadn't opened his eyes or ears for almost 16 years. Madhurakavi, on seeing Nammalvar, could not believe that a 16-year-old child can live without eating or moving a little bit for so many years. He wanted to test his qualities. He lifted a big stone which was found near the tree and dropped it on the ground but Nammalvar remained unmoved. Madhurakavi Alvar then asked him a riddle. On hearing this, Nammalvar opened his eyes and smiled at Madhurakavi Alvar. Finally Madhurakavi Alvar got the result of his visiting different holy places for liberation—he got his *guru* Nammalvar, who will give him the key to liberation.

Madhurakavi Alvar tested Nammalvar with many questions before surrendering to him and accepting him as *guru*.

Another significant incident in Madhurakavi Alvar's life is that he never bulged from his *guru-bhakti*. Even when the Supreme Lord came to him and asked him to sing a song of glorification, he did not do so. His only wish was to glorify his *guru* and follow his *guru's* instructions.

Srila Prabhupada in the mood of Madhurakavi Alvar

There is similarity in how Madhurakavi Alvar approached his *guru* and how Srila Prabhupada approached Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura.

> Abhay's friend Narendranath Mullik was insistent. He wanted Abhay to see a sadhu from Mayapur. Naren and some of his friends had already met the sadhu at his nearby asrama on Ultadanga Junction Road, and now they wanted Abhay's opinion. Everyone within their circle of friends considered Abhay the leader, so if Naren could tell the others that Abhay also had a high regard for the sadhu, then that would confirm their own estimations. Abhay was reluctant to go, but Naren pressed him.
>
> They stood talking amidst the passersby on the crowded early-evening street, as the traffic of horse-drawn hackneys, oxcarts, and occasional auto taxis and motor buses moved noisily on the road. Naren put his hand firmly around his friend's arm, trying to drag him forward, while Abhay smiled but stubbornly pulled the other way. Naren argued that since they were only a few blocks away, they should at least pay a short

visit. Abhay laughed and asked to be excused. People could see that the two young men were friends, but it was a curious sight, the handsome young man dressed in white khadi kurta and dhoti being pulled along by his friend.

Naren explained that the sadhu, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, was a Vaisnava (a worshiper of Visnu) and a great devotee of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu. One of his disciples, a sannyasi, had visited the Mullik house and had invited them to see Srila Bhaktisiddhanta. A few of the Mulliks had gone to see him and had been very much impressed.

But Abhay remained skeptical. "Oh, no! I know all these sadhus," he said. "I'm not going." Abhay had seen many sadhus in his childhood; every day his father had entertained at least three or four in his home. Some of them were no more than beggars, and some even smoked ganja. Gour Mohan had been very liberal in allowing anyone who wore the saffron robes of a sannyasi to come. But did it mean that though a man was no more than a beggar or ganja smoker, he had to be considered saintly just because he was dressed as a sannyasi or was collecting funds in the name of building a monastery or could influence people with his speech?

No. By and large, they were a disappointing lot. Abhay had even seen a man in his neighborhood who was a beggar by occupation. In the morning, when others dressed in their work clothes and went to their jobs, this man would put on saffron cloth and go out to beg and in this way earn his livelihood. But was it fitting that such a so-called sadhu be paid a respectful visit, as if he were a guru?

Naren argued that he felt that this particular sadhu was a very learned scholar and that Abhay should at least meet him and judge for himself. Abhay wished that Naren would not behave this way, but finally he could no longer refuse his friend. Together they walked past the Parsnath Jain Temple to One Ultadanga, with its sign, "Bhaktivinod Asana," announcing it to be the quarters of the Gaudiya Math.

When they inquired at the door, a young man recognized Mr. Mullik -- Naren had previously given a donation -- and immediately escorted them up to the roof of the second floor and into the presence of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, who was sitting and enjoying the early evening atmosphere with a few disciples and guests.

Sitting with his back very straight, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati appeared tall. He was slender, his arms were long, and his complexion was fair and golden. He wore round bifocals with simple frames. His nose was sharp, his forehead broad, and his

expression was very scholarly yet not at all timid. The vertical markings of Vaisnava tilaka on his forehead were familiar to Abhay, as were the simple sannyasa robes that draped over his right shoulder, leaving the other shoulder and half his chest bare. He wore tulasi neck beads, and the clay Vaisnava markings of tilaka were visible at his throat, shoulder, and upper arms. A clean white brahminical thread was looped around his neck and draped across his chest. Abhay and Naren, having both been raised in Vaisnava families, immediately offered prostrated obeisances at the sight of the revered sannyasi.

While the two young men were still rising and preparing to sit, before any preliminary formalities of conversation had begun, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta immediately said to them, "You are educated young men. Why don't you preach Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu's message throughout the entire world?"

Abhay could hardly believe what he had just heard. They had not even exchanged views, yet this sadhu was telling them what they should do. Sitting face to face with Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, Abhay was gathering his wits and trying to gain a comprehensible impression, but this person had already told them to become preachers and go all over the world!

Abhay was immediately impressed, but he wasn't going to drop his intelligent skepticism. After all, there were assumptions in what the sadhu had said. Abhay had already 'announced himself by his dress to be a follower of Gandhi, and he felt the impulse to raise an argument. Yet as he continued to listen to Srila Bhaktisiddhanta speak, he also began to feel won over by the sadhu's strength of conviction. He could sense that Srila Bhaktisiddhanta didn't care for anything but Lord Caitanya and that this was what made him great. This was why followers had gathered around him and why Abhay himself felt drawn, inspired, and humbled and wanted to hear more. But he felt obliged to make an argument—to test the truth.

Drawn irresistibly into discussion, Abhay spoke up in answer to the words Srila Bhaktisiddhanta had so tersely spoken in the first seconds of their meeting. "Who will hear your Caitanya's message?" Abhay queried. "We are a dependent country. First India must become independent. How can we spread Indian culture if we are under British rule?"

Abhay had not asked haughtily, just to be provocative, yet his remark was clearly a challenge. If he were to take this sadhu's remark as a serious one—and there was

nothing in Srila Bhaktisiddhanta's demeanor to indicate that he had not been serious—Abhay felt compelled to question how he could propose such a thing while India was still dependent.

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta replied in a quiet, deep voice that Krsna consciousness didn't have to wait for a change in Indian politics, nor was it dependent on who ruled. Krsna consciousness was so important—so exclusively important—that it *could not wait*.

Abhay was struck by his boldness. How could he say such a thing? The whole world of India beyond this little Ultadanga rooftop was in turmoil and seemed to support what Abhay had said. Many famous leaders of Bengal, many saints, even Gandhi himself, men who were educated and spiritually minded, all might very well have asked this same question, challenging this *sadhu's* relevancy. And yet he was dismissing everything and everyone as if they were of no consequence.

He felt himself defeated. But he liked it. He suddenly realized that he had never before been defeated. But this defeat was not a loss. It was an immense gain.

> **Srila Prabhupada**: I was from a Vaisnava family, so I could appreciate what he was preaching. Of course, he was speaking to everyone, but he found something in me. And I was convinced about his argument and mode of presentation. I was so much struck with wonder. I could understand: Here is the proper person who can give a real religious idea.

It was late. Abhay and Naren had been talking with him for more than two hours. One of the brahmacaris gave them each a bit of prasadam in their open palms, and they rose gratefully and took their leave.

They walked down the stairs and onto the street. The night was dark. Here and there a light was burning, and there were some open shops. Abhay pondered in great satisfaction what he had just heard. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta's explanation of the independence movement as a temporary, incomplete cause had made a deep impression on him. He felt himself less a nationalist and more a follower of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati. He also thought that it would have been better if he were not married. This great personality was asking him to preach. He could have immediately joined, but he was married; and to leave his family would be an injustice.

Walking away from the asrama. Naren turned to his friend: "So, Abhay, what was your impression? What do you think of him?"

"He's wonderful!" replied Abhay. "The message of Lord Caitanya is in the hands of a very expert person."

> **Srila Prabhupada**: I accepted him as my spiritual master immediately. Not officially, but in my heart. I was thinking that I had met a very nice saintly person.

(Ref: Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta)

The second similarity between Srila Prabhupada and Madhurakavi Alvar is how Madhurakavi Alvar gave precedence to serving his *guru* over even serving Krishna. Srila Prabhupada dedicated his entire life to follow the instruction of his *guru* Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura: spread the message of Lord Krishna to the English speaking countries.

After meeting his spiritual master Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati in Calcutta in 1922 and receiving the instruction of giving the message of Krishna consciousness to English speaking countries, Srila Prabhupada took formal initiation from him in 1933.

In 1936 Srila Prabhupada wrote to Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati asking if there was anything in particular that he could do for him. Srila Prabhupada received the reply that he should 'spread Krishna consciousness in the English speaking world'. This was the last instruction he received from his spiritual teacher, as Bhaktisiddhanta left this world soon after. This instruction made a great impression on Srila Prabhupada and formed the focus for the rest of his life.

Subsequently, Srila Prabhupada wrote an English commentary on *Bhagavad-gita* and assisted Bhaktisiddhanta's mission (the Gaudiya Matha) in its work. In 1944, during WWII, Srila Prabhupada began a magazine called *Back to Godhead*. Single-handedly he wrote, edited, oversaw the layout, proofread, and sold copies of the magazine.

In 1950 Srila Prabhupada retired from business in order to devote himself full time to his studies and writing.

In 1959 he entered the renounced order of life (*sannyasa*) and began his masterpiece—an English translation and commentary on *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. Working alone he bought paper, gathered funds, and arranged for the printing. Within a few years, he had completed the first of the 12 cantos of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* in three volumes. He sold the books himself and through agents in the larger Indian cities.

In 1965, at the age of 69, Srila Prabhupada travelled by ship to America and, once there, began teaching people about the Vaishnava tradition. Between 1966 and 1968 temples were established in several American cities. The first Ratha-yatra, a traditional festival that Srila Prabhupada had copied as a child, was held in 1967 in San Francisco.

From 1971 to 1977, Srila Prabhupada and his students developed ISKCON into a worldwide organization. Between 1966 and 1977, Srila Prabhupada travelled around the world fourteen times on lecture tours that took him to six continents. In spite of his rigorous schedule he wrote prolifically and his books form a veritable library of Vedic philosophy, religion, and culture.

Srila Prabhupada did all this as an offering to his *guru*. He gave more importance to following the instructions of his *guru* than his personal interests.

In his own words Srila Prabhupada recollects,

Srila Prabhupada: At that time, Guru Maharaja was indisposed little, and he was staying at Jagannatha Puri, on the seashore. So I wrote him letter, "My dear master, your other disciples, brahmacari, sannyasi, they are rendering you direct service. And I am a householder. I cannot live with you, I cannot serve you nicely. So I do not know how can I serve you."

Simply an idea, I was thinking of serving him, "How can I serve him seriously?" So the reply was dated 13th December, 1936. In that letter he wrote, "My dear such and such, I am very glad to receive your letter. I think you should try to push our movement in English." That was his writing. "And that will [do] good to you and to the people who will help you." That was his instruction. And then in 1936, on the 31st December—that means just after writing this letter a fortnight before his departure—he passed away.

But I took that order of my spiritual master very seriously, but I did not think that I'll have to do such-and-such thing. I was at that time a householder. But this is the arrangement of Krsna. If we strictly try to serve the spiritual master, his order, then Krsna will give us all facilities. That is the secret. Although there was no possibility, I never thought, but I took it little seriously by studying a commentary by Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura on the Bhagavad-gita. In the *Bhagavad-gita*, the verse *vyavasayatmika-buddhir ekeha kuru-nandana* [Bg 2.41], in connection with that verse, Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura gives his commentary that we should take up the

words from the spiritual master as our life and soul. We should try to carry out the instruction, the specific instruction of the spiritual master, very rigidly, without caring for our personal benefit or loss.

So I tried a little bit in that spirit. So he has given me all facilities to serve him. Things have come to this stage, that in this old age I have come to your country, and you are also taking this movement seriously, trying to understand it. We have got some books now. So there is little foothold of this movement.

Now on this occasion of my spiritual master's departure, as I am trying to execute his will, similarly, I shall also request you to execute the same order through my will.

(Ref: Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Disappearance Day – December 9, 1968, Los Angeles)

Conclusion: There is similarity in how Madhurakavi Alvar and Srila Prabhupada approached their *gurus*—from guarded scepticism, to submissive enquiry, to complete surrender. Madhurakavi Alvar stressed the importance of *guru-bhakti*. Srila Prabhupada exhibited supreme *guru-bhakti* by taking one instruction of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura as his life and soul.

KULASHEKHARA ALVAR

Kulashekhara Alvar appeared on this planet in 3075 B.C, at a place called Thiruvanjikkalam. He is tha manifestation of the Kaustuba jewel, which adorns the chest of Lord Vishnu. Kulashekhara became a very good administrator and warrior and gained his father's confidence.

The *Mukunda-mala-stotra*, although composed in elegant Sanskrit, is a simple expression of King Kulasekhara's devotion to Krishna and his eagerness to share his good fortune with everyone else. Of the many hundreds of poetic Sanskrit *stotras*—songs of glorification offered to the Supreme Lord, His devotees, and the holy places of His pastimes—King Kulasekhara's *Mukunda-mala-stotra* is one of the most perennially famous. Some say that its author conceived it as a garland (*mala*) of verses offered for Lord Krsna's pleasure. It has long been dear to Vaisnavas of all schools, and our spiritual master, Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, frequently enjoyed citing certain favorite stanzas from it.

krsna tvadiya-pada-pankaja-panjarantam

adyaiva me visatu manasa-raja-hamsah

prana-prayana-samaye kapha-vata-pittaih

kanthavarodhana-vidhau smaranam kutas te |33|

"My Lord Krsna, I pray that the swan of my mind may immediately sink down to the stems of the lotus feet of Your Lordship and be locked in their network; otherwise at the time of my final breath, when my throat is choked up with cough, how will it be possible to think of You?"

Of all the verses of the *Mukunda-mala-stotra*, this one was the most beloved of Srila Prabhupada. He frequently quoted it and sang it as a *bhajana*. On one of the first record albums His Divine Grace produced, he sang this *sloka* as a complete song. Devotees who served Srila Prabhupada often heard him sing it as he went about his daily activities, or sometimes alone in his room. He also quoted it many times in his purports. Here he explains it in the purport to the second verse of the Eighth Chapter of his *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*, in reference to the word *prayana-kala*, which carries the same meaning as *prana-prayana-samaye* in Kulasekhara's verse.

Srila Prabhupada in the mood of Kulashekhara Alvar

> In Montreal Prabhupada often sang a Sanskrit prayer composed by a great Vaisnava, King Kulasekhara. While walking around his room, sitting at his desk, or roaming through the house, he would sing to himself, and the others would hear him. He would chant it-it is a Sanskrit mantra-but to a tune of his own in a voice that dropped to a deep, low tone at the end of a line.
>
> In India almost twenty years ago, Prabhupada had translated and written commentary on this and several other verses—"The Prayers of King Kulasekhara"—for his *Back to Godhead* newspaper. Now, during the summer of 1968, while still recovering from his heart attack of a year ago, he sang this particular verse often. And several times he explained its meaning to the devotees gathered in his room in the evening.
>
> "Swans have a proclivity to stick their long necks underwater and wrap them around the stem of the lotus flower. So King Kulasekhara is praying, "My dear Krsna, may the swan of my mind enter the network of the stem of Your lotus feet.' He is praying to do

so now, at the present moment, while he is healthy and can chant Hare Krsna and entangle his mind in Krsna thought. Therefore, King Kulasekhara wishes that he may die immediately, because he fears that if he waits until later, when the time of death comes, he will be choking. The elements of his body will be disturbed, and there will be a death rattle, like "*gar*, *gar*.' How will it be possible then to remember Krsna?"

Prabhupada's health, however, had improved. Rising early, dictating *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, going for morning walks, taking full lunch—he was the healthiest.

(Ref: Prabhupada-lila)

Conclusion: Kulashekhara Alvar and Srila Prabhupada have a similar mood in praying to Krishna. In respect to all other Alvars, Srila Prabhupada exhibited their mood. But, in the case of Kulashekhara Alvar, he exhibited that mood throughout his life.